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[From the London Musical World.]

J. F. BARNETT'S "ANCIENT MARINER."

(CONCLUDED.)

Another might elect to deliver it so that the current of the story shall flow equably on, with but slight indications that the reader is anything but a reader, and mainly depending upon the fancy of the listener for dramatic interest. Both could be made excellent in their way, although as readings they would differ very widely. In illustrating the *Ancient Mariner*, Mr. Barnett has chosen to make large demands upon the imagination of those who hear his work. So far does his music fall short of realizing the incidents of the story, that it is evident he deliberately (perhaps wisely we say again) abstained from attempting realism. Accustomed as we are to the grandiosity of modern music, and its painfully labored efforts to express ideas rarely ever comprehended, the effect is unique and interesting. Most composers of the present day would have exhausted themselves in efforts to depict the marvellous incidents of the theme; with the likely result of producing a something showing hardly an intelligible outline—a musical puzzle requiring the help of a "key." Mr. Barnett never leaves us in doubt as to his meaning, never once wanders into the region of incoherence, though sorely tempted by the nature of the subject. Resolved to let the poem speak for itself by interfering as little as possible, he goes placidly through it, now rising somewhat, but never to the heights of passion, then sinking a little, but never to the depths of pathos. In short, he puts Coleridge forward and not himself, always keeping in the rear of his subject with a self-denial as becoming as it is justifiable. Precisely, therefore, because the poem is interesting, so is the cantata, and in the same degree. We congratulate Mr. Barnett on such a result, and on the remarkable tact displayed in securing it. The task he undertook was one of special difficulty. The incidents of the story could hardly be made more striking even by music, while any attempt at such a result involved the imminent risk of disastrous failure. All that remained was to describe them in music which should be innocuous. This Mr. Barnett has successfully done, and as a result one may rise from a hearing of the *Ancient Mariner* with one's previous estimate of Coleridge perfectly undisturbed. Of the power of the cantata to live we have not the smallest doubt. For reasons already specified it will be heard again and again; so long, in fact as people like music which makes no demand upon their faculties by the depth of its meaning, and, at the same time, never bores them by being utterly meaningless. Such people we shall always have with us, and, therefore, the *Ancient Mariner* will never want for admirers.

In adapting the poem for musical treatment Mr. Barnett has done very nearly the best possible. All the more interesting scenes are retained, while the elisions nowhere interfere with the progress of the story. We are not of those who attach any great weight to the objection urged against cutting the mariner's tale up into portions and dividing them among a number of people. Admit that objection and there is no escape from the conclusion that the poem is practically removed from the list of musical subjects. The *dramatis personæ* being two only, one of whom speaks but seldom, and then but few

words, while the other talks indefinitely, it is obvious that Mr. Barnett's method was the only one which rendered musica illustration possible. But, in addition to this, we fail to see any necessity for the realism underlying the objection referred to. Even in reading the story one cares little or nothing for, the present circumstances of the speaker and his unwilling listener, which are forgotten in its absorbing interest. Indeed, it is only by the poet's art in making the wedding guest now and then throw in an interjection, that we are reminded of the circumstances under which the events are narrated. But for this we should see nothing more than a succession of marvellous pictures beginning as the ship dropped merrily

"Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the light-house top;"—

and ending with the blessed hour of the return, when

"On the bay the moonlight lay,
And the shadow of the moon."

As such a panorama Mr. Barnett has treated his subject, rightly using those means which, in his judgment, seemed best adapted to each picture. It might be urged, that in doing so, a greater unity would have been obtained by ignoring the wedding guest altogether, and keeping simply to the voyage. We are not prepared to deny the force of this remark, but Mr. Barnett has chosen to retain him for purposes which pleasantly vary the music, and induce us to acquiesce without the slightest inclination to murmur.

A detailed analysis of the cantata would unduly prolong this article; we shall therefore defer till next week the pleasure of more minutely criticising Mr. Barnett's genial work.

SHAKESPEARE IN MAIDSTONE.

It may be considered a matter of interest to those who care about the immortal Shakespeare, or the celebration of his Tercentenary, to be informed, that it is something more than highly probable, that our great Bard publicly performed in this good old town of Maidstone.

Many months since I saw in one of our public libraries a list of strangers residing in Maidstone during the month of July, 1588, and amongst them occurred the rather singular entry of "James Burbage and ys fellows." I made a note of it at the time, little thinking who "James Burbage and ys fellows" could be, and the matter had almost faded from recollection, when I happened to see a copy of a patent or license granted to James Burbage and others, in 1574, to exhibit their performances as "p'ayers" throughout "the realm of England," under royal protection, as the "Queen's players."

Inquiring further, I found that "Burbage and ys fellows," of 1588, were really as follows:—James Burbage, Richard Burbage, John Laneham, Thomas Greene, Robert Wilson, John Taylor, Anthony Wadson, Thomas Pope, George Peale, Augustin Phillips, Nicholas Townley, WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, and four others. Now came the important question—Did the said "Queen's players" perform in Maidstone in 1588? It fortunately occurred to me that perhaps the ancient documents preserved in the Muniment room of the Maidstone Corporation would throw some light on this subject. By the kind assistance of John Monckton, Esq., our worthy Town clerk—whose cour-

tesy in this and other antiquarian matters I can never sufficiently acknowledge—I was allowed to examine the accounts of the payments made by the Chamberlains of the "Town and Parish of All Saints of Maidstone," and there, under the year of 1588, occur the following most important entries:

"1588.—Payd unto the Queen's players..... s. d. xlii. liii.
To the Queen's players, August the 2d. xx."

From this we shall find it impossible to arrive at any other conclusion, but that "Burbage and ys fellows"—including Shakespeare—who were the "Queen's players," were really performing at Maidstone in the month of July, 1588.

The usual place of performance in fine weather was the "High towne," or High-street, where a temporary stage with a covering was erected, and the exact locality seems to have been some eighty feet west of the Randall Drinking Fountain. In wet weather "ye Fre Schole" was given up to their use, and occasionally the scholars were allowed to assist the performers in their representations.

Other entries relating to the "players," besides those above quoted, occur in the Chamberlain's accounts, the most important of which are:

"1568.—Received of Mr. Nicholas Austin for s. d. vii. liii.
painted clothes left at the playe...
Given to the players by Mr. Maior's
commandment..... v. "
John Goslinge, for nayles which were
had to the playe..... v. "
Payd for layeing the timber of ye stage
together..... vi. "
"1569.—Payd to my Lord of Leicester's players
"1586.—Given to the Queen's players, and in
wyne bestowed by appointment of
Mr. Maior..... xx. "
Payd Wylkyns the carpenter for mak-
ing the scaffold for the children,
and nayles..... iv. "
Payd to Mr. Wyntley, then Maior, which
he gave my Lord of Leicester's play-
ers the xxlii. of January..... vi. liii.
"1569.—To my Lord Chamberlayne's players..... xx. "
"1593.—Layd out to the Queen's players..... xx. "
"To my Lordes, strangers, p'ayers..... xx. "
"1595.—Payd the Queen's players..... xx. "
The Lord Admirall's players..... xx. "
"1610.—Given to the players, the children of the
chappell, by Mr. Maior's appointment..... v. "
(The "children of the chapell" were the chorister boys
of the Chapel Royal.)

After this date theatricals declined in Maidstone, as in other places, and the dismal Puritan element spreading, soon rendered representations of this kind specially unpopular to that body of men, who ultimately sank this country into the gloomy depths of fanaticism, and very few amusements of any kind were tolerated by this party, where, or whenever they had the power to prevent them. The last extract which I shall give from the Chamberlain's account, has a twang about it which renders it perfectly irresistible:

"1610.—Payd to Clauser and Ha'chford for s. d. viii. "
keeping the boays of from the C.
terne in the time of the Munt
banks being in Towne..... "

STRALSUND.—Herr August Todt, organist from Stettin, lately got up a concert of sacred music for the benefit of the Children's Hospital. The programme included: Grand Fugue with Prelude in D minor, S. Bach; Overture to "The Messiah," Handel; Organ Sonata in C minor, Mendelssohn; Church-Aria for Soprano: "Ach, Gott, verlass mich nicht," Todt; "Ave Maria," for the Organ, arranged by Cherubini; "Pastorale," from "The Messiah," Handel; Grand Prelude with Fugue in A minor, S. Bach; and Grand Fantasia with Fugue on "Wie schönleuchtet der Morgenstern," Todt.